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Press release

ICFA (International Crocodilian Farmers Association) establishes and publishes new farming standards

ICFA announces the establishment of new farming standards: integrating environmental, social and animal welfare criteria, they represent a new benchmark for the industry.

The International Crocodilian Farmers Association (ICFA) has established and finalised new farming standards. The standards have been developed with the support of the University of Pretoria and are based on the research of all published works done in relation to crocodilian farming including work undertaken by international reference organizations, such as the Crocodile Specialist Group (CSG) of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and the OIE (World Organization for Animal Health).

Validated by a panel of experts on species conservation and animal welfare, these standards identify the best practices, from hatching to culling. They will thus enable farmers to respect the principles of sustainable farming: ensuring animal welfare, the best working conditions, respect for local communities and the protection of biodiversity and the environment.

The standards development process and the rules for certification of the ICFA Standards are based on the procedures and guidelines of ISO/IEC¹, ISEAL² and the WTO³. ICFA farm members are currently being audited to finalize their certification, meaning the compliance of their practices with the standards.

¹ International Organization for Standardization (ISO) et International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)

² ISEAL is the global membership association for credible sustainability standards

³ World Trade Organization

Supported by tanneries, manufacturers and companies of the luxury sector, ICFA brings together farms from all over the world that, by deploying the best farming practices based on current knowledge, can provide the guarantee that the precious skin products originating from their farms meet the highest sustainable development standards.

As an industry benchmark, these standards seek to enable the entire industry to move forward by adopting more sustainable and accountable practices.

ICFA is also committed to supporting research and working closely with crocodilian experts to undertake further research to develop new scientific knowledge and thus further improve standards over time.

ICFA notes that specialists in crocodilian conservation within the IUCN, the organisation providing global leadership on environmental protection and species conservation, have acknowledged that responsible farming can greatly assist the conservation of wild crocodile populations. As stated by Professor Grahame Webb, Chairman of the IUCN-CSG: "where farming is based on sustainable use of wild resources, and provides income to local communities, that directly assists their livelihoods, it encourages protection of habitats and stewardship of wild populations. This is as true for Louisiana as it is for Papua New Guinea, Australia and Zimbabwe, where wild populations of crocodiles, threatened with extinction in the 1970s, have recovered under enlightened management programs linked to farming."

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What is ICFA?

The International Crocodilians Farmers Association (ICFA) is an association.

It was established in September 2016 by 12 farm representatives from around the world (including Australia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, the United States, Thailand, Colombia and Mexico). They represent a significant part of the world production.

ICFA's objective is to promote sustainable crocodile farming practices, ie respectful of animal welfare, local populations and the environment, and to certify farms to ensure their compliance with the best practices.

ICFA promotes and funds research to improve scientific knowledge in a variety of fields such as animal welfare.

ICFA is supported by leading luxury brands, tanneries, producers and professional associations who want to ensure the sustainability of their products.

Standards and sustainable farming

Standards to ensure products sustainability

The crocodilian skins industry is a chain of actors, from farmers to brands, who share the demand for irreproachable quality and sustainable development. It is to meet this requirement of product sustainability that ICFA was created. It promotes the best farming practices, respectful of animal welfare, working conditions, environment and local populations.

Standards have been developed according to process

The ICFA Standards have been formalized from the experience of farmer members of the association and existing scientific documentation. They were developed with the support of specialists from the University of Pretoria.

They have been evaluated, challenged, validated and adopted by a "standards committee" gathering experts on crocodile welfare, species conservation, farming, regulation and certification systems. This committee includes veterinarians and scientists. Whenever possible, the standards are validated by scientific research.

The standards development process and certification rules are based on the ISO / IEC, ISEAL and WTO procedures and guidelines.

The standards cover all national and international regulatory obligations such as the CITES Convention (International Convention for Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)⁴.

Standards ensure that breeding practices are legal, sustainable, verifiable and humane.

A wide scope, in particular to ensure animal welfare

The standards provide guidance on best practices in the following fields:

- Health, welfare and biosecurity of crocodiles;
- Responsible use of veterinary medications;
- Traceability and integrity of products;
- Organizational management and personnel competence ;
- Biodiversity, environmental and emergency management.

The standards ensure the best possible respect for animal welfare. Based on the most recent methods, well-being is measured by indicators based on animal observation rather than on technical or management criteria.

Research and progress

The Standards are a living document based on existing scientific knowledge of crocodile welfare and husbandry practices. It will evolve according to the progress made by scientific knowledge.

ICFA and its members support and fund research, including to improve animal welfare and to develop objective and independent assessments to measure it.

⁴ CITES : CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Ethics

The respect for diversity of opinion is a fundamental pillar of our democracies. ICFA aims to provide all stakeholders with the scientific community and experts' knowledge on the issues of crocodilian farming and the conservation of species.

ICFA is part of the history of relationships between humans and animals. If civilizations around the world have changed their ways of using natural products and animals, none has given up using the natural resources at its disposal.

Where crocodilians are present, local people have always had contacts with them. Their modern breeding, based on principles of sustainable development, is linked to ancient relationships with these animals.

Sharing the imperative of respect for animals, ICFA's mission is to provide guarantees that its farming practices are humane and ensure the best possible consideration of animal welfare.

The legitimacy of crocodile farming is also directly connected to their role in conservation: IUCN's Species Conservation Experts, the reference organization for the protection of the environment, have demonstrated that the responsible use of wildlife is the best for protecting endangered species.

Farming helps protect crocodilians

Crocodilians conservation and local development

Historically, crocodiles were considered pests and hunted without restriction. For many local populations, this hunting and egg harvesting was guided by their alimentary needs, but it intensified as the skin took value. At the same time, wetlands were converted to agriculture for commercial food production.

In the 1960s, conservation concerns began to outweigh the reduction of damaging wild populations, now threatened with extinction. IUCN⁵, the recognized global environmental protection agency, worked to create a trade regulatory instrument that gave birth to CITES (International Convention for Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) in 1975. CITES Signatories have all implemented wildlife management which link trade and conservation programs.

Crocodilians farming was thus developed in the 1950s and 1960s to locally produce crocodile skins, and as a mechanism for the conservation and repopulation of wild animal. The farms played a central role in preventing the extinction of crocodiles.

Farming contributions to sustainable development

Livestock farming creates a viable business model that encourages local people to protect animals and their environment. Farms pay landowners, which gives value to unproductive lands.

Farm viability requires that they can sell skins, meat and derived products. Destabilizing this model by opposing the use of animal products would undermine the conservation of crocodiles and their habitat, as species with no commercial value are now suffering.

Although this may seem counterintuitive, this model combining consumption and conservation has been proven efficient for almost half a century.

In addition, the protection of wetlands where crocodiles live requires active management. By providing local people with tangible benefits related to the presence of animals, they are also encouraged to preserve their habitat by combating its degradation. This management is essential for the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems. And the benefits for the people themselves come from the economic and social development permitted by the creation of regular income.

Link to IUCN experts' paper

Published in March 2019, this paper explains the contribution of farming to conservation.

<https://www.iucn.org/crossroads-blog/201903/banning-exotic-leather-bad-reptiles>

⁵ IUCN: The International Union for the Conservation of Nature is made up of governments and civil society organizations. Founded in 1948, IUCN has grown over the years to become the largest and most diverse environmental network in the world. It has 1300 members and 15 000 experts. IUCN is a reference on the state of nature and natural resources in the world and on measures to preserve them.